

ZELOTES HOLMES HOUSE  
(Octagon House)  
619 East Main Street  
Laurens  
Laurens County  
South Carolina

HABS NO. SC-376

HABS  
SC  
30-LAUR,  
1-

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ZELOTES HOLMES HOUSE HABS NO. S. C. 376

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SC  
30 LAURE  
1-

Location: 619 East Main Street, Laurens, Laurens County,  
South Carolina

Present Owner: Mrs. Fred Walker and Mrs. A. D. Putnam

Present Occupant: None

Present Use: Vacant

Statement of  
Significance: This is a large, unusually planned, octagonal  
house in the "Italian" style designed and  
built from 1859 to c. 1862 by the original owner  
for his own residence. It is an excellent ex-  
ample of the "gravel wall" construction advocated  
by Orson Fowler during the period and is impor-  
tant as an advance in the state of the art of  
building in the octagonal mode.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The house was built on 88 acres of land originally owned by John Garlington within the corporate limits of the village of Laurens. It was sold by him to Zelotes Holmes for \$3,570 on November 12, 1857. About November of 1859, construction was begun on the cellar story, Rev. Holmes having recently been appointed professor at the Laurensville Female College. Work proceeded slowly and was finished c. 1862.

Rev. Holmes died in 1885 and the house remained with his heirs until July 31, 1919, when it was sold along with 8-1/2 acres to Mable H. Moorehead for \$8,000. In 1924, it was sold to W. G. and T. B. McDaniel and W. L. Gray for \$2,423.50 on April 29 only to be in turn sold by them on June 6 to Leola A. Watson.

Upon Mrs. Watson's death, her heirs sold the property to Mrs. Belle Sumeral on Sept. 18, 1961, and upon Mrs. Sumeral's death in 1965, the property passed into the hands of her two sisters who are the present owners.

2. Date of Erection: 1859 - c. 1862.
3. Architect: The house was designed and its construction superintended by Zelotes Holmes. Holmes (c.1815-1885), an active and enterprising man, was reputed to have been an excellent carpenter. The influence of his older brother in New York, who was a civil engineer, is unknown and Rev. Holmes is not credited with the design of any other structure.
4. Alterations and Additions: About 1900, several major changes were made in the original fabric. Electricity was introduced throughout and indoor bathrooms installed in the northeast portion of the first and second floor. The former kitchen, which had occupied the northeastern wing, was refloored and a new doorway cut to the summer dining room. The rear porch was raised level with the first floor and the northwestern wing (original use unknown) was made into a bedroom with several new openings provided. It is believed that leaks in the original tin roof over all four wings compelled the owners to cover them with the present shed roofs, in the course of which the front wings' roof lines were altered. Coal burning fireplaces were installed in most of the old log ones about this time.

A second major alteration occurred about 1940 when the property was divided into a four-plex. Two new bathrooms were provided in the northwestern portions of the first and second floor, new kitchen sinks and cabinets provided all around, the coal fireplaces converted to gas heater use, and several new doorways cut in the upstairs chambers for easier passage.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Josiah Holmes of Duxbury, forebear of Zelotes Lee Holmes, was the son of William Holmes of Marshfield and Situate, Massachusetts. He married Hannah, the daughter of Henry Sampson, a passenger on the Mayflower in 1620, too young at 15 years to sign the Mayflower Compact.

Their descendants, after having served in the Revolutionary War, moved to New York state; Zelotes Lee Holmes was born there in Sheridan. Orphaned at an early age, he worked his way through college at Meadville, Pennsylvania, Oberlin

University in Ohio, the University of East Tennessee in Knoxville, and finally the Theological Seminary in Columbia. A Presbyterian Clergyman, he married Catherine Nancy Nickels, the daughter of a planter in South Carolina, became a resident of Laurens, and a professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy in the Laurensville Female College.

His eldest son, Nickels, was partner in a very prominent Laurens law firm until he resigned to devote himself to the ministry in 1888. Eventually he founded Holmes Theological Seminary which is in Greenville, South Carolina.

His youngest son, Joseph, was a professor at the University of North Carolina and later State Geologist of that state for some years. He went on to become the first Chief of the U. S. Bureau of Mines.

The youngest daughter, Mary Belle, was an accomplished pianist and an extraordinary artist. She went to New York in the 1890's to develop her talent but was forced to abandon her work because of an allergy to paint. In 1899, she joined the staff of "The Door of Hope" in Columbia, South Carolina which provided aid and care to unwed mothers.

Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: None known.
2. Bibliography:

Hibben-Larkin, Dictionary of American Biography. New York, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961, Vol. V., pp. 167-168.

Holmes, N.J., Life Sketches and Sermons. Royston, Georgia: Press of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, 1920, pp. 7-23.

Landis, John T. Mayflower Descendants and Their Marriages, Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1964, p. 29.

Tolbert, Marguerite, et al. South Carolina's Distinguished Women of Laurens County. Columbia, South Carolina: R. L. Bryan Company, 1972, pp. 46-51.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is an unusually large and original adaptation of the octagonal form of building to the problems of residential design.
2. Condition of fabric: good to fair

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The basic shape is octagonal with each outside wall 21 feet long. On alternate walls, at the first floor level, 15 x 21 foot rectangular wings project and the spaces between are filled by porches. Overall length and width is 74 feet.
2. Foundations: Slabs of quarried pink granite 5' long, 21" wide, and 18" thick.
3. Wall Construction, finish and color: "gravel wall" (slaked lime, sand, and stone) construction 18" thick in cellar stepping back to 12" at roof. Exterior finished in tan colored smooth stucco scored to imitate stone.
4. Structural system, framing: 2 x 12 joists @ 24" o.c. throughout covered with irregular width T&G wood flooring 1" thick. There is no sub-flooring.
5. Porches: There are three original porches remaining with beaded wood rafters supported by octagonal columns (stucco on brick) and there are traces of a fourth porch on the rear now replaced by a new one.
6. Chimneys: There are fourteen original octagonal chimneys rising through the roof and two ventilators similarly shaped, all stucco on brick. A metal stove pipe rose through the roof of the northwestern wing.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is on the south porch. Jib doors open from the parlor and dining room onto their respective porches.

- b. Windows: Wooden double hung windows on the first and second floor have six-over-six light sash. Double hung windows in the library side walls have two-over-two light sash.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: an octagonal roof with flat "Captain's Walk" at the crown. The original roof slope was covered with standing seam metal roofing and the walk with flat metal roofing. The wings had standing seam metal roofing formed in Vee shape and pitched to drain.
- b. Dormers: There is one gabled dormer in the rear to give access to the roof. Originally provided with a sash, it is presently fitted with a plank door.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: There is a cellar with dirt floor under the entire house. It contains three slaves' quarters and several large storage spaces. The central space was originally completely sealed except for the ventilators at the top of the east and west walls.
- b. First floor: The entrance opens into the stair hall with the stairs to the right. To the left, a cased opening leads past a closet and into the southwest wing which was the library. To the front, an arched opening leads into the main hall to the skylight which rises 32 feet from the floor. To the left of this great space is the parlor (also called the music room) and to the right is the dining room, both entered through large double doors. Directly ahead is a door leading to the summer dining room.

The southeast wing, an office or bedroom, connects with the dining room and a closet through an arched opening. This wing has an outside entrance on the front porch. The northeastern wing was originally the kitchen and opened into the dining room. The

northwestern wing has been considerably altered from its original purpose and now connects with both the parlor and summer dining room through a former storage closet.

- c. Second floor: The main stair leads to three bedrooms and a small storage room above. The remaining bedrooms were originally reached by the back stairs in the summer dining room. At present, all rooms interconnect.
  - d. Attic: The attic space is floored between the access stairs and the dormer to the roof and contains one ventilator opening in the north-east corner.
2. Stairways: The main stair is an open-well closed-string stair of irregular plan with slender tapered balusters. A simple moulded handrail, beginning with a newel post at the first floor runs unbroken to the second floor.

There is an enclosed wooden stair in the summer dining room which leads to the bedrooms above.

3. Flooring: The original random width (3-3/4"-6-3/4") T&G wood flooring remains throughout most rooms. The wood floor in the dining room is composed of even width (3-1/2") boards. The northwest wing, kitchen, and all bath areas are covered by sheet linoleum.
4. Wall finish: painted plaster
5. Ceiling finish: Painted wood boards except for in the skylit main hall which is painted plaster.
6. Doorways and doors: Paneled wooden doors have simple wooden trim which matches that around the windows. This trim rests on wooden blocks at the floor on the first floor but continues to the floor line on the second floor doors. The parlor and dining room spaces have jib doors leading out to the porch areas and are connected to the skylit central hall by double doors.

Doorways and trim are now painted white. The doors are a dark, hard wood, probably walnut.

7. Trim: The parlor, summer dining room, and dining room ceilings have simple wood trim. All upper story rooms lack cove moulding.
8. Hardware: Round porcelain knobs with porcelain roses survive throughout.
9. Lighting: Electric ceiling fixtures. All are incandescent and date from the turn of the century.
10. Heating: There are fireplaces in all of the principal rooms. The wood mantel in the parlor is the most notable in the house.

D. Site

1. General orientation: The house faces south toward the main street (formerly the Newberry Road which also leads to Clinton) and sets back 220 feet.
2. Outbuildings:
  - a. Stable - no remains
  - b. Privy - no remains
  - c. Cistern - no remains
  - d. Chicken house - no remains
  - e. Back kitchen - no remains
  - f. Slave quarters - no remains
3. Walks and gardens: A semi-circular drive connected the house with the road. A kitchen garden and an orchard were to the east side. The remaining areas were in grass with no formal planting.

Prepared by Bruce Klee Brown, Architect  
511-B Wilton Street  
Greenville, South Carolina  
December 1973



PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation made during the autumn of 1973 by the Architect in cooperation with Mrs. Charles Allen representing various local individuals and organizations interested in preserving the Octagon.

The project was under the supervision and direction of Bruce Klee Brown, Architect. Assistants who took measurements for the drawings were George H. Kinney and Gordon S. Poteat. Photographer David Kay made the documentary photographs.

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ADDENDUM  
FOLIO 93

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Addendum To:  
Zelotes Holmes House (Octagon House)

HABS No. SC-376

Location: 619 East Main Street, in Laurens, Laurens County,  
South Carolina

Date of Construction: 1859

Architect:

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Octagon House is architecturally significant as one of the few surviving octagon houses in South Carolina. Thought to be the first concrete house constructed in South Carolina, it was built by Rev. Zelotes Lee Holmes and his slaves, using lime, cement, sand, and crushed rock. There are porches on all four sides and has a one-story porch on intervening four sides. There are paired octagonal-shaped chimney caps.

The interior features include a front hall, an octagon-shaped central hall (two stories in height with skylight and second story balcony), and square rooms with triangular-shaped closets.

The octagonal mode of building became popular after 1848, when Orson Squire Fowler from the State of New York published Home for All; or, the Gravel Wall and Octagon Mode of Building.

The Octagon House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on March 20, 1973.

Source of Information: National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form

Compiler: Andrew W. Chandler  
South Carolina Department of Archives and History  
May 2, 1988

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